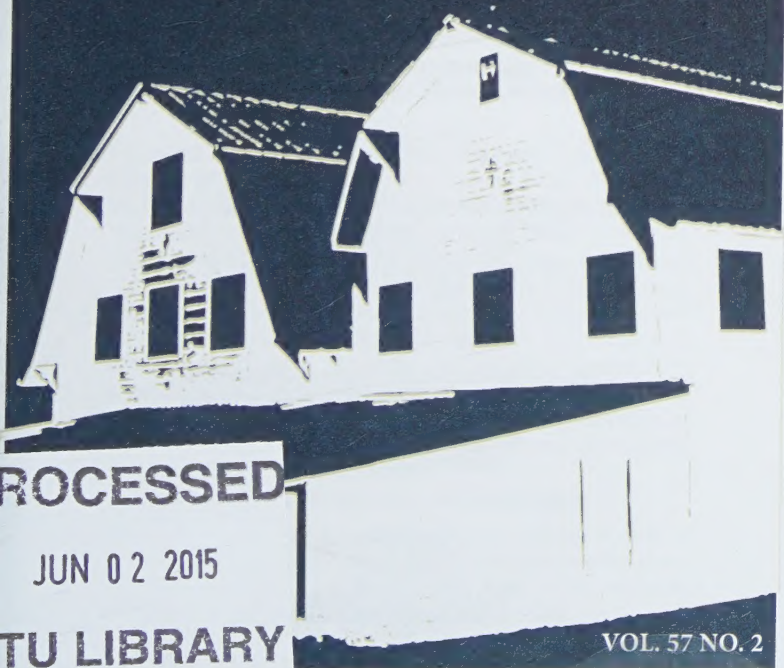


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The Anglican Digest

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For fifty-seven years, *The Anglican Digest* (TAD) has been the leading quarterly publication serving the Anglican Communion. From its inception, TAD's mission has been "to reflect the words and work of the faithful throughout the Anglican Communion." At a time when print editions are becoming an endangered species, TAD remains a familiar presence in the homes and offices of many Episcopalians.

Founded in 1958 by the Rev. Howard Lane Foland (1908-1989), our heritage is "Prayer Book Catholic," and is open to the needs and accomplishments of all expressions of Anglicanism: Anglo-Catholic, Broad, and Evangelical. Thus, TAD does not cater to any one niche or segment of the Church, but finds its enduring ethos in serving the Church, including her clergy and lay leaders, those theologically educated and "babes in Christ." Each issue, therefore, is unique, representing a mixture of themes for a varied audience, including emerging ministry ideas for clergy and laity, devotional and historical material, as well as humor and news briefs from around the Communion.

TAD is sent to anyone who desires to receive it, and is supported by contributions. To receive your own copy or to partner with us in sharing the work of the faithful, visit anglicandigest.org or call 479-253-9701.

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FROM THE EDITORS

This issue of THE ANGLICAN DIGEST is centered around the Sacrament of Baptism. The water of baptism is the outward and visible sign; being “sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and marked as Christ’s own for ever,” being “grafted into the Church,” is the inward and spiritual grace.

Yet, central as it is, many of us were baptized as infants, and so have no memory of it. (In my case, not only was I just a few weeks old, but I slept right through it—perhaps not surprising, given that my father baptized me). Others make the vows for us, promise to see that we will be “brought up in the Christian faith and life,” declare they will help us “grow into the full stature of Christ.” On our behalf, they renounce Satan, spiritual forces of wickedness, the evil powers of this world; on our behalf, they vow to turn to

Jesus, accept him as Savior, and trust in his grace and love.

For many of us, it is the baptisms of others we recall—younger siblings, cousins, the children of friends and relatives, godchildren, even the children of strangers. And it is at those later baptisms, when we are capable of thinking and speaking for ourselves, capable of making our own vows, that we join with the person being baptized and renew our own baptismal covenant.

Such a vital and fundamental moment, we think, deserves its own issue. We thank our authors for sharing their work with us, and we hope our readers will find their words interesting, inspiring, and perhaps even worth sharing with friends unfamiliar with TAD.

GUEST QUARTERS

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BAPTISM WHY BOTHER?

THE REV. JANE SCHMOETZER
RICHLAND, WA

When I was first asked to write this article, I'll admit that the initial reason I gave sounded a bit flip, not to mention self-centered: people should have their children baptized because that way I get to hold all those cute babies! The truth is, in a manner of speaking, the reasons for being baptized are both that simple and that profound.

Our prayer book gives an explanation of what happens at baptism in two places. There's a section in the Catechism (p. 858) which talks about the nature of the sacrament, what is required of us, and how the promises are made and carried out—either by us, or (if we are baptized as infants) on our behalf. It's a good expla-

nation of how baptism works, as far as it goes.

Ah, but then there's a section in the baptismal liturgy itself, a set of rubrics on p. 298 labeled "Concerning the Service," which begins with these two sentences: "Holy Baptism is full initiation by water and the Holy Spirit into Christ's Body the Church. The bond which God establishes in Baptism is indissoluble." These two sentences seem to me to sum up as well as anything WHY one should be baptized.

The key is full initiation by water and the Holy Spirit. "Full initiation" means just that—the whole enchilada. Baptism makes one a full member of the Christian family as surely as changing one's birth certificate in a court of law establishes one's legal family in an adoption. There is a point at the end of the baptismal liturgy where the congregation greets the newly baptized by

saying, "We receive you into the Household of God." Nothing else is required. The one who was baptized five minutes ago is as wholly part of the tribe as the 80-something matriarch who grew up in the church.

Christ's Body the Church—the capital letters here are important. They remind us that being baptized in a given church does not only make us members of that congregation. Nor are we merely Episcopalian (although being Episcopalian is a good and joyful thing!). When we are baptized, we become Christians, part of the Church Universal in all its grand and messy glory. We are brothers and sisters with other disciples all around the world, of many denominations or none at all (including some, it must be admitted, who seem to delight in putting the fun in dysfunctional; something inevitably part of the human

condition. But don't let that put you off; every household has its characters, and the joys far outweigh the challenges). We also become part of the Communion of Saints, connecting us to that "great cloud of witnesses" who have gone before us. It is a glorious company, and there is always room for one more.

The bond which God establishes in baptism is indissoluble. There are some traditions which consider baptism a cleansing rite, rather like the custom of a Jewish mikvah bath for ritual purification, that can be repeated whenever one needs renewal.

We do not see it that way. After a candidate is baptized with water, he or she is anointed with chrism oil and told, "You are sealed by the Holy Spirit in baptism and marked as Christ's own forever." Once someone has been baptized and sealed with the Holy

Spirit, she or he is a member of the family, period. There are, as the kids would say, “no take backs.” Remember how I compared it to changing a birth certificate in adoption? This is even more permanent; no judge can ever revoke or undo it. The connection with God established in that moment is and always will be holy and real.

I always make a point of this at baptisms. After the congregational greeting, I introduce the newly baptized. I carry infants or toddlers; older children and adults walk on their own. As we move up and down the aisle, I point out that those sitting in these pews are new brothers and sisters, aunts, uncles, and cousins. Family. “These are people who have promised to love you on hard days,” I say, “and to support your walk with Jesus.” The church is a place of both comfort and challenge, where you can al-

ways find refuge. I may quote Robert Frost: “Home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in.” So too the church, because we are now bound to God, and part of Christ’s family, together. Forever.

So yes—it really is true that I get to hold the babies when they are baptized. And I get to shake hands with or give a hug to older candidates as well. That is as it should be because at baptism we become integral parts of the same household—the Body of Christ. I can think of no better reason to be baptized.

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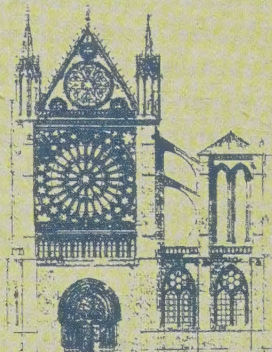
Melissa Kilmer, author of the article CALLED TO SACRIFICE in the Spring 2015 issue of TAD lives in Salsibury, MD, rather in Cambridge, MA.

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THE WEIGHT OF WATER

THE REV. KRISTINA MAULDEN
TULSA, OK

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. These words connect together all the sacred moments of baptism throughout the ages of the church. We are linked through water and the Spirit of God, drawn together by the thread of God's grace and love. This living water announces us as God's beloved.

It cannot be the amount of water or the age of the candidate. It is not the hours of preparation. Jesus said, go forth and do this, in my name. And so we do. Our obedience to this call is as essential to the rite as the ones who answer the call to come to the water. I have been drawn into many conversations over the years about the details of baptism.

Is it legitimate if we pour rather than immerse? What about the age and knowledge of the candidates? Should we wait for children to be old enough to speak for themselves? All these questions seem to miss the point for me. The water of baptism carries a far deeper significance and mystery than any external consideration.

It is early spring in Texas. I am driving to Galveston beach to be part of a baptismal service for several young adults. One young woman in particular stands out for me. She was unchurched until six months before. She was brought into our college fellowship group and became excited about God, ministry, and baptism. Her life was taking a dramatic turn—from party girl to committed follower of Christ. The day itself was perfect. There was a light breeze over the waves and the sky was a sunny, pale blue. We all waded into the water, soft and cool,

so clear we could see schools of fish swimming past us. To me, there was a sense of the Spirit hovering, just near the surface. Completely submerged, my friend came up out of the water glowing with joy and peace.

Another baptism, sadder and sudden, in the ICU at a hospital in Orlando. A couple vacationing in Florida had a baby come too early—her fragile body perfectly formed, but simply not ready. While her tiny human form struggled to keep breathing, her parents' tears and three still drops of holy water baptized that little one. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. She left this earth soon after, carried by that same Spirit back to God's heart. For her grieving mom and dad, this baptism helped mark for them her short journey on this earth and the assurance of seeing her again.

A four year old boy and his mother recently joined the church I serve in Tulsa. She is a single mom living day-to-day. They were both baptized in our family service on the Feast of the Baptism of our Lord. The mom knelt by our child-sized font the entire time, so excited to become part of this community. The little boy, with his expressive eyes and dimples, turned his head towards me as I poured water on his head. He giggled at the movement of the water across his forehead, spilling over his cheeks. That gentle laughter was sign and symbol to me of that same Spirit moving in his heart.

Two other boys were baptized at Trinity a few years back. One was eight and the other six. They wanted to be baptized in a way that honored their father, who was baptized in the river according to his Pentecostal tradition.

I had to find a font for them. I ended up at a feed store in Wagoner County, Oklahoma. I could not find the right size or shape, so I talked with the cashier. She said she knew just the thing. She said that I really needed something in a cruciform shape. They had a good size tub that would be perfect and if I wanted, I could return it after the baptism. The two young men who brought it out to my car were thrilled that this big basin would be put to holy use. Sunday morning brought two boys, covered in water, three times each, then wrapped in towels, carrying the light of Christ in candle form. Indeed, they were marked as Christ's own forever.

Is that not what we all are seeking—to be known by God and belong to community? Together, water, oil, and the light of a candle signal for us this new life.

I'M NOT A FAN OF THE BAPTISMAL COVENANT

THE REV. ROBERT F. SOLON, JR.
VERNON, NJ

At the Easter Vigil or during the Great Fifty Days, many of us will likely hear, “Let us join with those who are committing themselves to Christ and renew our own baptismal covenant.” The celebrant says this to the congregation just after the Renunciations in the service of Holy Baptism, and what follows is even explicitly labeled “The Baptismal Covenant” on page 304 of the *Book of Common Prayer*.

We all know what happens next. We will, in question-and-answer form, first recite the Apostles' Creed, the most ancient creed of the Church. And then we will commit or recommit ourselves to a series of behavior-

al propositions or standards, five in all, to which we answer, when asked, “We will, with God’s help.”

I actually quite appreciate the text of this rite. In a page-and-a-half or so, it encapsulates what we understand about God and how we will be in light of that understanding. To my mind what have become known by some as “the baptismal promises” are a fine summary of the expectations we can and should have for each other in Christ. These are the commitments we (at least theoretically) make to enter and remain in Christian community.

But here is where I get a little itchy. We call this rite a “Covenant.” A covenant, theologically speaking (and separate from any civil jurisprudence) is, according to *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, “an agreement enacted between two parties in which one or both

make promises under oath to perform or refrain from certain actions stipulated in advance.”¹ And the *New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* pretty much concurs: “A covenant is a formal commitment made by one party to another party, or by two parties to one another; its seriousness is normally under girded by an oath and/or rite undertaken before God and/or before other people.”² In other words, a covenant creates a relationship where one did not exist and ordinarily has commitments or promises that both make in order to keep the relationship in effect.

¹George E. Mendenhall and Gary A. Herion, “Covenant,” ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1179.

²John Goldingay, “Covenant, OT and NT,” ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006–2009), 767.

We're used to covenantal language. The readings from the Old Testament (or "Covenant"!) during Lent in Year B all have to do with God's covenants made to humanity, Abraham, the Israelites, etc.

And one only has to glance through the salvation history of Israel from Judges through Kings to see that "covenant" was the defining characteristic of the relationship between God and Israel: Essentially, "follow my Torah, and I will bless you. If you don't, I won't." Possibly the clearest (and most terrible) explicator of this covenant theology is the prophet Ezekiel, who goes on for chapters and chapters in judging, with woefully harsh terms, the people for breaking the Covenant. Of course, the idea of the Covenant with Israel is far deeper than this. St. Paul in Romans is careful—and correct—in explicating it in chapters 9-11.

And that brings us to the New Covenant. This is the covenant enacted by Jesus at the Last Supper, with the Bread of his Body and his Blood of the New Covenant. That blood is actually poured out on the Cross, and then sealed in the Resurrection. Like all covenants of God, it is God who initiates it, beginning with the Annunciation (some might say even earlier, and I wouldn't demur), and it is God, in Christ Jesus, who enacts it first with the disciples and then with all believers. But as St. Paul points out again and again, that covenant is a covenant of grace—God reconciles us in Christ Jesus as his free and unearned gift, because he wants to. There is nothing we can do to earn it. We enter into that ongoing covenant when we are baptized, and as the prayer book notes explicitly on page 298, "Holy Baptism is full initiation by water and the Holy Spirit into Christ's Body

the Church. The bond which God establishes in Baptism is indissoluble.” From God’s perspective, baptism is forever—he himself will never repudiate it.

And so that’s my problem with calling the rite of baptismal renewal a “covenant.” To my mind, it isn’t really, because we can do nothing to enter into it. We bring nothing to the table but ourselves. The first half of the text, the Apostles’ Creed, is essentially a not-terribly-clear description of what God does for us in the creedal formulas of who God is. (The Nicene Creed is actually more direct in this regard: “Who for us, and for our salvation, came down from heaven...” actually tells what Jesus is doing in becoming human, rather simply implying it in the description of who he is.) The five “baptismal promises” cannot then be what we do to earn entry into Christ’s Body, the Church, but

only how we *respond* to the initiative God takes first. We love—we follow Jesus by loving others using the five baptismal promises as standards and guides—because God first loved us. (1 John 4:19) Any other understanding of those five behavioral standards seems to me to deny God’s free initiative and grace and turn baptism into a contract, and that is explicitly not what baptism is at all.

Don’t get me wrong. I’m a huge fan of the rite of renewal of baptism that we recite on the Baptismal Sundays. I usually don’t even mind too much when it is included seemingly at the drop of a hat (or a miter) into Diocesan and other services. But I wish it wasn’t called a “Covenant.” It’s simply “Baptism.”

BAPTISM

THE REV. BETH MAYNARD
CHAMPAIGN, IL

Between two Sunday services, I once passed through the nave and found a pair of grade school children, a sister and brother whom I had baptized a few months earlier, gathered with several of their Sunday School classmates. They had clearly brought the group in on their own initiative and everyone was clustered around the font. Many of the children stood on tiptoe, straining to see what was going on, as the sister and brother reached into the hollow pool and played Baptism-Make-Believe. I watched as they happily poured and splashed and cupped in their hands lots and lots of imaginary water. Then, as they turned their attention to an unbaptized preschooler in the group, I realized that I had come in on the middle of a conversation; "This is where it happens," they told him.

"You should do it. It's neat."

I don't know whether Jesus ever brought disciples to the Jordan to witness the site of his baptism by John, whether the Ethiopian eunuch ever invited his entourage back to that pond, or whether Saul, who is also called Paul, sometimes took a detour in Damascus to pass by that house on a street called Straight. But revisiting our own baptisms can be an important thing to do. Last year I had the chance, after a long absence, to go into the church where I was baptized in my late teens. I made time to take a picture of the font which I keep in my phone just to remind myself: "This is where it happened. Since then, nothing has ever been the same."

Thinking and talking about their experience of baptism often occurs to adult converts who have come to the waters from the increasing

numbers of Americans who were “raised nothing.” (In the Public Religion Research Institute’s *2014 American Values Atlas*, the largest single faith group listed is “Unaffiliated” at 22% nationwide—as high as 37% in some states.) However, it remains true, at least for the time being, that many other church members were brought up in an environment where they, along with everyone else in their families, unquestioningly received infant baptism and pubescent confirmation. It was expected; one did that sort of thing.

People from this background may never have been back to take a look at that font, to plunge their hands into the water and ask: What really happened there? What is all the fuss about?

To answer those questions, we should call to mind that baptism is the sacrament of the fact that anyone who be-

comes a Christian is changed at the level of their being. We go into the water as people of old creation, of natural life. We lose none of that kind of life in baptism; it is a life God values, or else he would not have come to us in Jesus to share it. While we always retain that life, we also come out of the water having been immersed in something completely new. We come out of the water soaked with the life Jesus took down into it at his own baptism so he could meet us there: the very life of God, which takes up residence from that moment in our depths.

New Creation, divine life, the indwelling Spirit: whatever you want to call it, it is a change at the level of our being, not at the level of our function or our opinions or what group we have joined—although if we let that New Creation life have free rein and take its course in us, it

will, indeed, begin to shape what we do, how we think, and to whom we commit. But Christianity doesn't originate in those kinds of things; we start by being immersed into the life of God.

That immersion happens at every baptism. Sometimes you could almost swear that you see evidence of it right then—which is, of course, not always the case. When a baby is baptized, God, I presume, observes a change immediately. God knows that this infant has been immersed into Jesus and therefore is a carrier

of New Creation, inhabited by the Spirit. Our human eyes don't necessarily perceive that in others and our human habits or opinions don't necessarily line up with it in ourselves. It can take years before a baptized person connects with the change that has happened to them in a way that lets it become visible and effective. Some people, sadly, never seem really to make that connection. But whether or not you have connected with it, if you are baptized, it is there. New Creation is inside you, waiting.

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CLOTHED IN CHRIST

THE REV. PAUL A. NESTA
DENISON, TX

As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

– Gal. 3:27

The clothing we wear has become that which defines the average twenty-first century American. Not only do we intrinsically judge others for what they do or do not wear, we have come to see our own self-identity and self-worth in direct correlation to what we put on each day. We are made to believe, through all sorts of advertising campaigns, that in and of ourselves we are lacking something, and that a particular brand or style can make us a complete person.

As damaging as this cultural materialism may be, there exists a greater danger for those who bear the name of Christ

in baptism. The propensity exists for each one of us to adapt that same sort of mentality in our spiritual life. This is the exact problem that St. Paul encountered within the Church at Galatia. Instead of embracing the fact that their identity was in Christ, some of the Galatians were looking to works of the law as their badges of membership in the covenant. So, in typical Pauline fashion, the good Apostle doesn't beat around the bush when addressing them. "You foolish Galatians," he writes, "who has deceived you? All who rely on works of the law are under a curse" (3:1,10). These members of the church failed to understand that they were not accepted by God on the basis of how well they kept the law, but on the basis that they were now "in Christ."

The very thing the Galatians ran to for absolution (the Law) condemned them. The irony of it all is that they were

seeking raiment while being clothed with the finest of garments. The situation could be likened to a man who walks into a thrift store to buy a new suit while wearing a suit designed by Alexander Price valued at over \$100,000. Paul was correct to call the Galatians fools. “As many as have been baptized into Christ have been clothed,” not with just any clothing but “with Christ.”

In baptism we are clothed with Christ, and a fundamental change of being is brought about in us. We are transferred from the dominion of darkness into the kingdom of God’s marvelous light, where we discover that there’s a new dress code in effect. Having put on Christ in baptism, we find that we are called to continually put on those garments that God desires his children to wear by adorning ourselves with every virtue and good work through the

power of the Holy Spirit. As St. Paul directs the Ephesians, “Clothe yourselves with the new man, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (4:24).

Perhaps one of the most significant ways that we can continue to clothe ourselves with Christ is by loving those who share our common baptism. To return to the illustration of branding, all baptized Christians share the same threads; those who have been baptized into Christ wear the same name brand. Yet in any given congregation one may find human pride and selfishness tearing apart the unity that is ours in Jesus. The reason this happens is simple: we begin to focus on one another and our differences, rather than focusing on Jesus Christ, in whom is our unity. When this happens, our differences eclipse the Gospel.

The Church is phenomenally diverse. We have people from varied economic and cultural backgrounds, differing political perspectives, and a wide range of other differences. Then there are ecclesiastical and theological differences such as churchmanship, worship styles, or how to “re-imagine” the Episcopal Church in the twenty-first century, just to name a few. This is not to say that these issues do not matter or that we should go along to get along, but when Christians allow these or a whole host of other issues to erect barriers between us and other Christians, we are living apart from the new creation we were made to be by virtue of our common baptism. Our baptism into Christ should cause us to see each other in a new perspective, just like St. Paul says to the Corinthians: Christians are now new creations in Jesus, so “we regard no one from a human point of

view” (see 2 Corinthians 5:16-17).

Issues that create division, hostility, and enmity in the world ought not do so within the community of the baptized. Ours is a community in which division, hostility, and enmity have been shattered by the Cross of Christ. This much is made clear when St. Paul writes, “[Christ] is our peace; in his flesh he has made both [Jews and Gentiles] into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us” (Ephesians 2:14). There is no “them” and “us” in the Church, for we are united through the reconciling work of Christ on the cross. This reconciliation is made ours in the waters of baptism, where all who are baptized into Christ are clothed with Christ. As Episcopalians, we talk quite a bit about being a baptismal church. Yet in the past few

decades, this rhetoric has not played out well in terms of our unity with one another. We may not be at risk of relying on the Law of Moses like some of the Galatians, but our risk is great of undermining the ramifications of our baptism. Maybe it is time we put down our stones and realize we are wearing the same brand, we belong to the same family, and we have been washed with the same waters of baptism—whether we like it or not.



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RITE OF PASSAGE

THE REV. AIDAN KAVENAUGH

I have always rather liked the gruff robustness of the first rubric for baptism found in a late fourth-century church order which directs that the bishop enter the vestibule of the baptistery and say to the catechumens without commentary or apology only four words: “Take off your clothes.” There is no evidence that the assistants fainted or the catechumens asked what he meant. Catechesis and much prayer and fasting had led them to understand that the language of their passage this night in Christ from death to life would be the language of the bathhouse and the tomb—not of the forum and the drawing room.

So they stripped and stood there, probably faint from fasting, shivering from the cold of early Easter morn-

ing and with awe at what was about to transpire. Years of formation were about to be consummated; years of having their motives and lives scrutinized; years of hearing the word of God read and expounded at worship; years of being dismissed with prayer before the faithful went on to celebrate the Eucharist; years of having the doors to the assembly hall closed to them; years of seeing the tomb-like baptistery building only from without; years of hearing the old folks of the community tell hair-raising tales of what being a Christian had cost their own grandparents when the emperors were still pagan; years of running into reticent and reverent vagueness concerning what was actually done by the faithful at the breaking of bread and in that closed baptistery Tonight all this was about to end as they stood there naked on a cold floor in the gloom of this eerie room.

Abruptly the bishop demands that they face westward, toward where the sun dies swallowed up in darkness, and denounce the King of shadows and death (and things that go bump in the night). Each one of them comes forward to do this loudly under the hooded gaze of the bishop (who is tired from presiding all night at the Vigil continuing next door in the church), as deacons shield the nudity of the male catechumens from the women, and as (women deacons) screen the women in the same manner. This is when each of them finally lets go of the world and of life as they have known it: the umbilical cord is cut, but they have not yet begun to breathe.

Then they must each turn eastwards toward where the sun surges up bathed in a light which just now can be seen stealing into the alabaster windows of the room. They must voice their accep-

tance of the King of light and life who has trampled down death by his own death. As each one finishes this, he or she is fallen upon by a deacon who vigorously rubs olive oil into his or her body.

When all the catechumens have been thoroughly oiled, they and the bishop are suddenly startled by the crash of the baptistery doors being thrown open. Brilliant golden light spills out into the shadowy vestibule, and following the bishop the catechumens and the assistant presbyters, deacons and sponsors move into the most glorious room most of them have ever seen. It is a high, arbor-like pavilion of green, gold, purple, and white mosaic from marble floor to domed ceiling sparkling like jewels in the light of innumerable oil lamps that fill the room with heady warmth. The windows are beginning to blaze with the light of Easter dawn. The walls curl with

vines and tendrils that thrust up from the floor, and at their tops, apostles gaze down, robed in snow-white togas, holding crowns. They stand around a golden chair draped with purple upon which rests only an open book. And above all these, in the highest point of the ballooning dome, a naked Jesus stands up to his waist in the Jordan as an unkempt John pours water on him and God's disembodied hand points the Holy Spirit at Jesus' head in the form of a white bird.

Suddenly the catechumens realize that they have unconsciously formed themselves into a mirror-image of this loft icon on the floor directly beneath it. They are standing around a pool let into the middle of the floor, into which gushes water pouring noisily from the mouth of a stone lion crouching atop a pillar at poolside. The bishop stands beside this, his pres-

byters on each side: a deacon has entered the pool, and the other assistants are trying to maintain a modicum of decorum among the catechumens who forget their nakedness as they crowd close to see. The room is warm, humid, and it glows. It is a golden paradise in a bathhouse in a mausoleum: an oasis, Eden restored: the navel of the world, where death and life meet and become indistinguishable from each other. Jonah peers out from a niche, Noah from another, Moses from a third, the paralytic carrying his stretcher from a fourth. The windows begin to sweat.

The bishop rambles a massive prayer—something about the Spirit and the waters of life and death—and then pokes the water a few times with his cane. The catechumens recall Moses doing something like that to a rock from which water flowed, and they are mightily impressed. Then a

young male catechumen of about ten, the son of pious parents, is led down into the pool by the deacon. The water is warm (it has been heated in a furnace), and the oil on his body spreads out on the surface in iridescent swirls. The deacon positions the child near the cascade from the lion's mouth. The bishop leans over on his cane and, in a voice that sounds like something out of the Apocalypse, says: "Euphemius! Do you believe in God the Father, who created all of heaven and earth!" After a nudge from the deacon beside him, the boy murmurs that he does. And just in time, for the deacon, who has been doing this for fifty years and is the boy's grandfather, wraps him in his arms, lifts him backwards into the rushing waters and forces him under the surface. the old deacon smiles through his beard at the wide brown eyes that look up at him in shock and fear from beneath the

water (the boy has purposely not been told what to expect). Then he raises him up coughing and sputtering.

The bishop waits until he can speak again, and leaning over a second time, tapping the boy on the shoulder with his cane, says: "Euphemius! Do you believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, who was conceived of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, and was crucified, died and was buried? Who rose on the third day and ascended into heaven, from whence he will come again to judge the living and the dead?" This time the boy replies like a shot, "I do" and then holds his nose "Euphemius! Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the master and giver of life, who proceeds from the Father, who is to be honored and glorified equally with the Father and the Son, who spoke by the Prophets? And in one holy, catholic and apostolic church which is the

communion of God's holy ones? And in the life that is coming!" "I do."

When he comes up a third time, his vast grandfather gathers him in his arms and carries him up the steps leading out of the pool. There another deacon roughly dries Euphemius with a warm towel and a senior presbyter, who is almost ninety and is regarded by all as a "confessor" because he was imprisoned for the faith as a young man, tremulously pours perfumed oil from a glass pitcher over the boy's damp head until it soaks his hair and runs down over his upper body. The fragrance of this enormously expensive oil fills the room as the old man mutters: "God's servant, Euphemius is anointed in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." Euphemius is then wrapped in a new linen tunic; the fragrant chrism seeps into it, and he is given a burning terracotta oil lamp

and told to go stand by the door and keep quiet. Meanwhile, the other baptisms have continued.

When all have been done in this same manner the clergy strike up the Easter hymn, "Christ is risen from the dead, he has crushed death by his death and bestowed life on those who lay in the tomb." To this constantly repeated melody interspersed with the psalm verse, "Let God arise and smite his enemies," the whole baptismal party—tired, damp, thrilled, and oily—walk out into the blaze of Easter morning and go next door to the church led by the bishop. There he bangs on the closed doors with his cane: they are flung open, the endless Vigil is halted and the baptismal party enters as all take up the hymn, "Christ is risen" which is all but drowned out by the ovations that greet Christ truly risen in his newly-born ones.

As they enter, the fragrance of chrism fills the church: it is the Easter-smell, God's grace olfactorally incarnate. The pious struggle to get near the newly baptized to touch their chrismed hair and rub its fragrance on their own faces. All is chaos until the baptismal party manages to reach the towering ambo that stands in the middle of the pewless hall. The bishop ascends its lower front steps, turns to face the white-clad neophytes grouped at the bottom with their burning lamps and the boisterous faithful now held back by a phalanx of well-built acolytes and doorkeepers. Euphemius' mother has fainted and been carried outside for air.

The bishop opens his arms to the neophytes and once again all burst into "Christ is risen ... Christos aneste" He then affirms and seals their baptism after prayer, for all the faithful to see, with an authoritative

gesture of paternity—laying his hand on each head, signing each oily forehead once again in the form of a cross, while booming out: “the servant of God is sealed with the Holy Spirit.” To which all reply in a thunderous “Amen,” and for the first time the former catechumens receive and give the kiss of peace. Everyone is in tears.

While this continues, bread and wine are laid out on the holy table; the bishop then prays at great length over them after things quiet down, and the neophytes lead all to communion with Euphemius out in front. While his grandfather holds his lamp, Euphemius dines on the precious Body whose true and undoubted member he has become; drinks the precious Blood of him in whom he himself has now died; and just this once drinks from two other special cups—one containing milk and honey

mixed as a gustatory icon of the promised land into which he and his colleagues have finally entered out of the desert through Jordan’s waters. Then his mother (now recovered and somewhat pale, still insisting she had only stumbled) took him home and put him fragrantly to bed.

Euphemius had come a long way. He had passed from death into a life he still lives.

The Rev. Aidan Kavanagh, OSB, was born in 1929 in Mexia, Texas. He became a Benedictine monk of Saint Meinrad Archabbey, Saint Meinrad, Indiana, in 1952 and was ordained to the priesthood in 1957. Kavanagh taught at Saint Meinrad School of Theology and also at the University of Notre Dame, where he was the director of graduate studies in liturgy and theology. In 1974, he joined the faculty at Yale Divinity School as a professor of liturgics. “A Rite of Passage” was delivered as part of a lecture at the Theology Institute at Holy Cross Abbey in Canon City, Colorado, in 1977. He died in 2006.

TEARS AND THE JORDAN

MAGDALENA M. ADERS
MATAWAN, NJ

My daughter, Marietta (or 'Ta, as she later nicknamed herself) was born with a comparatively rare internal medical condition. After a quick Caesarian birth on a post-blizzard morning, Marietta was brought to me as I was being taken from the recovery room. I had not yet seen her; I had been "knocked out" for the procedure because the doctor had not expected the child to be born alive. I would not be able to hold her, since she was in an isolette, but I would be able to touch her fingers with my own. She was going to another hospital, from which she would be transferred to another, and then another. I was to remain where I was for a week with my own complications. A handshake

at a cocktail party takes longer than that touch did, and we would not see each other again for several days.

Marietta came into the world during the period that I was away from the Christian Church altogether. There were many friends, family members, and co-workers around me in my hospital room, but no clergy...because I hadn't asked for any. Today, it is a staggering thought that "Please call my priest" were not among my first words. Today, I would have texted my priest as I was on my way out the door to go to the emergency room. So among my many questions—such as "What does she look like?" (there were no camera phones in 1986), and "She's not in any pain, is she?", as well as "Am I going to be able to take her home soon?"—there was one question which is now conspicuous in its absence. "What to do about her baptism?"

In the clarity of retrospection, I recognize how utterly different the experience would have been if Marietta's baptism had been part of, or headed, my priority list—or been on any list at all. I was asked by a couple of people if I had given that any thought. I answered vaguely, something along the lines of, "Oh, I don't know about that—maybe later on—I may go Unitarian or something—not right now." The unique circumstances of her birth, along with other life circumstances at the time, changed the usual pattern of birth, initial bonding, homecoming, further bonding, and developing the family unit. Marietta was a beautiful and observant child, the instant apple of nurses' eyes, of whom I was extremely proud. I thought of her in terms of a mind ("I hope she loves literature as much as I do, and we can share that") a social human being ("I don't want her feelings to get hurt in school

because she's different!") and someone I had brought into the world ("Look at that full head of blonde hair and that Kewpie doll face! That's MY baby.") It didn't occur to me at that time to think of her as one of God's own...and I didn't even know the phrase "kingdom of priests," let alone imagine her to be a part of such a kingdom.

Fortunately, her baptism did take place. There was no christening-gown, no candle or silver shell or golden ewer or white linen purificator. No renewal of baptismal vows from the congregation or bidding to "welcome the newly baptized." Years later, as I grew more and more deeply into the Anglican tradition, I was to have moments where I began to grieve that. But the subsequent realization—or re-realization—was that John the Baptist never had those elements of ritual. Therefore, Jesus himself had none of these

symbols in that most pivotal moment when he stood in the river Jordan as the Holy Spirit visibly descended upon him.

Marietta was baptized with one of her own tears. I was not present. The baptism was performed by a close family friend who was visiting her in the neonatal ward. There was reason to believe, at that time, that Marietta would not spend much more time on this earthly sphere and our friend, who thereafter was Marietta's godmother, felt called to administer the shortened emergency rite. It was brief and quiet and private. And Marietta was no less marked as one of Christ's own forever than if she had been christened at a great cathedral with the harmonies of magnificent choirs and cascades of bell tones amid clouds of fragrant incense (however frequently I imagine such a ceremony for her with wistfulness).

It was a very long time later when I would realize that all of us who are baptized can be said to be baptized with a tear, as the Cross, Death, and Resurrection attest.

Two years ago I had my turn to act in the role of godmother when I sponsored a friend I had known since her childhood as she chose to be baptized in her thirties. As I stood by the rose marble font, holding the white candle and watching as water and the Holy Spirit initiated a new Christian life, I thought back to all the great chain of people brought into the kingdom of priests in powerful moments such as this. The ways that they arrived there were diverse, and what they would do with this new life was widely varied as well. But the connection is infinite.

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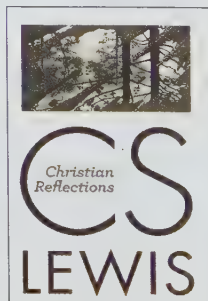
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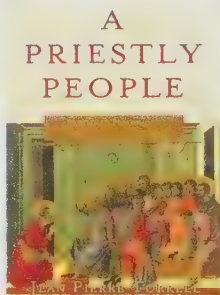
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BAPTISMAL IMAGINATION

THE REV. CLINT WILSON
DENTON, TX

As I was preparing a homily on the baptism of Jesus, I stumbled across a wonderful poem by Malcolm Guite from his book, *Sounding of the Seasons*, which sparked my baptismal imagination:

Beginning here we glimpse the Three-in-one;
The river runs, the clouds are torn apart,
The Father speaks, the Spirit and the Son
Reveal to us the single loving heart
That beats behind the being of all things
And calls and keeps and kindles us to light.
The dove descends, the spirit soars and sings
‘You are beloved, you are my delight!’
In that quick light and life, as water spills
And streams around the Man like quickening rain,
The voice that made the universe reveals
The God in Man who makes it new again.
*He calls us too, to step into that river
To die and rise and live and love forever.*

The last two lines especially gripped my heart, my mind, my being, and my thoughts were illumined by the light of multiple scriptural passages that flashed like neon signs in my memory. I was reminded once again that this call “to step into that river” and to follow our Lord has always been God’s call to God’s people.

It was God's call to the Israelites, who were led out of bondage from Egypt through water, through the Red Sea, and across the Jordan before entering to the Promised Land. Right there in the Old Testament we see that God delivers his people, and calls them to be a blessing to others—to bring about a common good beyond their own community—*but only after leading them through baptism; through water.*

Of course, Israel did a less-than-stellar job at this, and so the prophet Isaiah spoke of one to come who would fulfill this role: "I have put my **Spirit** upon him, *he* will bring forth justice to the nations." It is this Spirit-anointed-one who in the words of Isaiah will be "a light to the nations," who will "open the eyes that are blind," and who "will bring prisoners out from the prison of their own darkness." The Psalmist (in chapter 89) links this King's rule to the very places where the people were brought through water to salvation, saying, "*I shall make his dominion extend from the Great Sea to the River.*"

And all of this coalesces in the baptism of our Lord—in the opportunity to be drowned in his grace that he opens up to us. We have the Spirit descending from the heavens. We have the link between baptism and salvation. And later in Acts, we have the content of his baptismal ministry: "Jesus...went about doing good and healing."

Doing good and healing—this is the Church's call as well. *If you are baptized, then this is what you signed up for.* Think about the baptismal covenant we renew at every baptism, which asks:

- Do you believe in God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,

which is to say, the very three persons we see animating our texts for today?

- Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself? Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?
- Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?

It also asks us to order our lives around patterns of worship that continually call us back to being a people of doing good and healing:

- Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?

Through these patterns that the Church followed all the way down to the present day, we are formed powerfully in order to say, "this is our fundamental story, not the various counter-narratives offered to us." And this is no small matter, because stories and how we conceive of reality are important and shape how we live day to day.

One person who understood this so well is one of my favorite authors, C.S. Lewis. He was baptized, but not merely physically—his entire being, including his mind and his imagination were baptized. Lewis, along with J.R.R. Tolkien and Flannery O'Connor, are all more recent examples of Christians who exercised what might be called a *baptismal imagination* (for more on this, read *Baptismal Imagination* by Kerry Dearborn). This is what we are called to exercise as well—to *step into the river* with our all our being.

One example Dearborn references is from Tolkien's series, *The Lord of the Rings*: Consider the following quote: "The Elves may fear the dark Lord and they may fly before him, but never again will they listen to him or serve him," and Tolkien would go on to say that they do not fear the Ringwraiths, because "they have now seen the Blessed Realm." Does this not sound like the Baptismal Liturgy, which asks of the candidate, "Do you renounce Satan and all the spiritual forces of wickedness that rebel against God?" and "Do you renounce the evil powers of this world which corrupt and destroy the creatures of God?"

The point here is that baptism and a baptized imagination give us a vision of all reality, beyond the horizon of the immediate and finite, such that when we see suffering and violence (and more), instead of losing hope and becoming overwhelmed, we are instead able to have a renewed vision of the wonder of God's grace that penetrates into the darkness. This leads away from cynicism or escapism...to hope.

When the Church—when we, when you and I—understand this, we realize how baptism affects all areas of one's life, from art to music to business practices and more. Imagine architects and urban planners who conceptualized buildings that are good not only for their clients, but for those clients neighbors as well. (The two do not have to be mutually exclusive!) Imagine a civic leader who, upon failing publicly, did not spin and vacillate but genuinely repented. Imagine an entertainment industry that respected the dignity of every human being, and how that might change the world. You see, the baptismal covenant calls us to a baptismal imagination, and it is not hard at all to see how this would change the world if we take it seriously.

HE AIN'T HERE!

THE REV. DR. WILLIAM J.
DANAHER, JR.
BLOOMFIELD HILLS, MI

In the 5th century, Augustine believed that babies cried when they were being baptized because they were full of the devil. I'm pleased to let you know that we have developed a more generous theology since then. We believe that they're crying because they are a little uncomfortable.

In fact, their tears and discomfort will be a blessing. They remind us that baptism, particularly on Holy Saturday, marks a critical transition. Everything we do serves to heighten the tension in this transition. The Easter Vigil begins in a darkened church, the only light provided by the candles we carry. An outsider walking in might expect a ghost story rather than some kind of religious rite.

But in fact, what we do during the Easter Vigil is profoundly important. When we go through these motions we actually enter space that has existed since at least the 4th century. We are celebrating the world's movement from death to life, from sin to salvation, from brokenness to wholeness, from woundedness to healing, because of who Jesus is as God and man.

This movement pivots around baptism, because baptism is the moment in which we turn away from the power of sin, evil, and death, and turn toward the power of life, God, and salvation. We dedicate ourselves to the forces that bring this goodness into the world. We align ourselves with whatever brings God into the world, whatever brings life into the world, whatever brings salvation into the world, and that is what Christians would call "perfect justice."

Even though babies and young children baptized at the Vigil won't remember what has happened, it does not really matter, because what is powerful about baptism is not what we say to God.

What is powerful about baptism is what God says to us: We have been claimed by God. We have been given to God. Our life is now bound up in the life of God, and that's a great blessing. And that's something that none of us ever deserves or, frankly, understands. It's a truth that is so deep that we spend the rest of our lives trying to understand our connection with God.

For six years, I lived in Tennessee, and I loved to read the messages posted on the signs outside of churches. I made a small hobby out of watching these church signs and commenting on them in my

mind. Sometimes they were wonderful; sometimes not so wonderful.

An example of a wonderful one was: "Honk if you love Jesus. Text if you want to meet him." An example of ones that were less than wonderful was: "If you think it's hot now, imagine Hell." One time, during Easter, I saw a sign that said "He ain't here." I thought, "What? Am I missing something?" I thought that Jesus' resurrection meant that he was here—vividly here. But then I realized that this sign made the most profound and powerful statement about Easter I've ever read.

The statement goes with the grain of the resurrection account depicted in the Gospel of Mark that we read at the Easter Vigil: "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here."

With these words, Mark conveyed a very profound point: Jesus is no longer among the dead. All of us are bound to this world and all of us will die. Jesus is not here. Jesus is with the living now. His body has been raised, he has ascended, and he is seated at the right hand of God. He is not here, and that is good news, because he has risen.

He is not here, but he is present. Because the power of that resurrection for us means that we have new life in Christ. The power of that resurrection for us is that now we meet Christ in each other, and we meet Christ in our friends and strangers. We meet Christ when we look in the mirror. We see ourselves beloved of God, chosen by God, part of God's body, which means we are joined to Christ through grace.

All of this is bound up in Easter. All of this is bound up in

the Resurrection. All of this is bound up in baptism, because in baptism we are buried with Christ so that we are raised with him. We are part of his body. That is what baptism means.

To be a Christian is to take part in a kind of embodied community, meeting Christ in the body of Christ on the altar, meeting Christ in the mystical body of Christ that is the Church. And that's good news because when Christ is present, life is present. When Christ is present, salvation is present. When Christ is present, healing is present. So he ain't here. But he is present. Let us bless the Lord.

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REGULARLY BAPTIZED

THE VERY REV. DAVID HALT
BLOOMINGTON, IL

“Raise your right hand and repeat after me.” Twenty years later, I can still hear the voice of the gruff recruiting sergeant at the Lansing Military Entrance Processing Station. As a wet-behind-the-ears, almost-college-graduate, I raised my hand and repeated—and became a member of the United States Army Reserve. In my twelve years from private in the Reserves (Military Intelligence) to First Lieutenant (Chaplain Candidate) in the National Guard, I strove to do my duty faithfully and well. I even have the ribbon to prove it.

That moment of enlistment is one I cannot forget. I remember feeling swollen with pride, that I was giving myself over to do a duty, volunteering to

make the world a better place and protect my loved ones and all others who called this country home. The glitter and romance of enlistment faded quickly during basic combat training, but there was always in the back of my mind a belief that what I was doing was serving and benefiting someone. There were other moments along the way that cannot be forgotten. I wish I could forget some, but others are truly precious memories.

One cold April day, I was visiting a decontamination company, and had the blessing of baptizing a young second lieutenant who had been raised an atheist. His baptism, planned a month ahead, was the result of a yearlong journey of conversation and preparation and was to be celebrated with his “family” in uniform. With the commander’s permission, we appropriated a 3000-gallon water blivet that had been set up for the exercise and pro-

ceeded to the baptism. As I ungracefully crawled over the edge and into the icy water, I took a mental trip back twenty years to my own baptism in the icy waters of Lake Somerset, Michigan. In that moment, a new realization bubbled to the top of my mind: God had enlisted me already, and was enrolling another in those cold blivet waters.

For as many of us as have passed from death to life in Christ through the waters of baptism have been made a part of the body of Christ, and as long as we walk this current earth we are enrolled in the Church Militant, called to share the conquering love of God in Christ. Some of us are “volunteers” coming to the faith as adults; some of us are “draftees” having been baptized without first giving our permission, since we were then too young to speak.

The great English pastoral theologian Martin Thornton used the Regular Soldier, guided by The Queen’s Regulations, as the image of the Regular Christian who grows in holiness a relationship with Christ, the Church, and the World. The Baptismal Covenant in the 1979 Book of Common Prayer gives us the terms of our enlistment. Following our renunciation of loyalty to any other Lord and our affirmation, in the Apostles’ Creed, of who this Lord is, we directly commit ourselves to the work of being Regular Christians with God’s help in all things.

What does this regularity look like? It begins with faithfulness to the essential tenets of the Gospel in the apostles’ teaching, and not making it up as we go. We then bind ourselves to fellowship in the local church community and, with it, celebrating the Holy Mysteries, acknowledg-

ing that we cannot serve faithfully without our comrades and the Divine Life given in the Sacrament.

We promise that we will struggle to live lives of Christian holiness, and, when we fail, as we so often will, to examine ourselves, repent, and return, confident in the forgiving love of God. We swear that the Gospel will be in our hearts, minds, words, and actions. We swear that the love of God will be made known in our service to the world so that others may be drawn to Jesus.

We pledge that we will see others as bearing the image of Christ and seek to love them with the same love we have for ourselves, the love whose origin is God alone. We commit to working to correct societal ills by striving for peaceable solutions and reconciliation, by treating all with respect and dignity.

We take on the obligation of these promises not as we feel, or when we like, or even one weekend a month and two weekends in the summer. In our baptisms, we are enlisted to be Regular Christians; to live out our vows, perform our service, each moment of each day. I do not want to be a reserve Christian. Are you the Regular Jesus has called you to be through baptism, or are you still in the reserves?



MARKED AS CHRIST'S OWN

THE REV. EZGI SARIBAY
NASHOTAH HOUSE
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
NASHOTAH, WI

**You are marked as Christ's
own forever...**

In the baptismal liturgy of the Book of Common Prayer, the candidate for baptism is anointed with the oil of chris-

mation immediately after baptism, and is charged with these powerful words in the presence of the congregation: "You are marked as Christ's own forever..." If we stop to think about these words carefully, we realize that something permanent—the Holy Spirit's indelible mark on one's soul, if you will—is taking place in that moment. According to our Anglican tradition, one cannot undo what has happened in baptism. So then, what happens to us when we choose to be baptized? Have you ever thought about that? When I ask this question of myself, I am immediately taken back to the moment I was baptized as a 17-year-old formerly-Muslim girl. The minister had read the Great Commission very carefully, and a few faithful people started to sing the hymn: "Shall We Gather at the River?" After I gave my public acknowledgement to dedicate my life to Jesus Christ and

restated my desire to be baptized, I was immersed three times in the cool waters of Jack's Fork River in southern Missouri.

My baptism was my public commitment to Christ and his reconciling Love. It was the moment I chose Jesus Christ above all else—over family, country, past relationships, and even the possibility of returning back to my home country, Turkey, because of my permanent decision to be Christ's own forever. I recognized, at that moment, my inability to save myself. Only then was I free to accept the Savior who has accomplished the work of salvation by stretching out his arms on the hard wood of the cross for the sins of the world.

The depth of his sacrificial love and the power of his grace were so overwhelming to me that I, in return, wanted to be fully washed three times

in deep waters to commit my life to his life, death, and resurrection.

A couple of days ago, I had the privilege of singing one of the most ancient chants of the Church in the Easter Vigil, the Exsultet. The following passage from this chanted exposition of the theology of salvation made me reflect on the power of my baptism into the life of Christ once more:

This is the night, when you brought our fathers, the children of Israel, out of bondage in Egypt, and led them through the Red Sea on dry land. This is the night, when all who believe in Christ are delivered from the gloom of sin, and are restored to grace and holiness of life.

That is exactly what baptism does. It frees us just as our ancestors the Israelites were freed from their bondage in Egypt and led through the waters of Red Sea. Once

again, through water, God restores humanity from the bondage of not only slavery but from dwelling in eternal sin. Eternal death due to sin is vanquished in the moment of baptism¹⁶ and we are born into a life of grace and holiness through the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Although I was not taught the richness of these theological truths in my former religious formation, our beloved Episcopal Church has taught me the depth of the commitment I made in baptism through the Baptismal Covenant. Baptism enables us to enter into the New Covenant of God through Christ that we can only be proven righteous through our faith in Christ for he is the only one who was able to keep the Law perfectly. Through baptism, we are saved, once and for all, and are incorporated into the Body of Christ as his individual members.

This fellowship of the Holy Spirit and of the Saints enables and strengthens us to live the Christian life, even at those times when temptation is strong and sin tries to recapture our souls. We are reminded that we will never be alone in this life of discipleship after our baptism. Ours is the promise that we are received permanently into the household of God to confess the faith of Christ crucified, to proclaim his resurrection, and to share in his eternal priesthood. What a great privilege that is!

In traditional Episcopal churches, at the entrance to the nave, there are two items placed immediately in front of the narthex doors: the baptismal font, and the holy water font. We often see parishioners walk through the doors and cross themselves with holy water before they sit down in the pews. Both the baptismal font and the ritual

of imposing ourselves with holy water are there to remind us of our entrance into the faith through waters of baptism. We enter into the life of Christ through baptismal water and end the Sunday liturgy with the Sacred Banquet of Eucharist, together with the company of the saints around the altar. Someday, by God's grace, we shall be doing the same as we gather around the Wedding Banquet of the Lamb, Jesus Christ, and sing praises to him in the company of the faithful forever and ever. We will be freed eternally from our bondage to sin and death in the New Heaven and the New Earth. All of this is possible because we have chosen to say yes to Christ, abandoned our former lives with repentance, and are sealed by the Holy Spirit in the moment of our baptism to be Christ's own forever. Thanks be to God!

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PRESENCE TO SHARE

THE REV. TOBIAS STANISLAS
HALLER, BSG
FORDHAM, BRONX, NY

Christmas and Epiphany are long over. The wise men have come and gone. The Holy Family has bundled the gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh into the saddlebag and wended their way to Egypt to await news of when it will be safe to return to Galilee. We too have had a chance to sort through our Christmas gifts. There may well have been fewer of them this year, and some of them may not have been exactly what we had in mind, were they? The economic situation has led to some rather more practical items under the tree than the kind of more frivolous gifts we might have wanted. I even wonder, given the cost of heating oil and natural gas, if some people might not have wished for the item reserved

for naughty children: a sock full of coal!

Of course, whenever we receive a gift that isn't something we wanted, we put a good face on it. We are, after all, Anglicans, and have been brought up with that British heritage of politeness that would never insult the giver of an unwanted gift. Rather, the less desirable gifts have been discreetly returned to the department store or consigned to the attic, that shelf at the top of the closet, or some similar resting-place for other people's good intentions.

Sometimes as we stow away some unwanted present we come upon a previous year's gift and realize, with a start and surprise, that we need it after all—the curtains that seemed so dark last year are now just right to go with the new armchair. That paperweight I had no room for will

now be just right on my new desk. New times can make the old seem new again.

On the other hand, sometimes we receive gifts we know at once to be “just what we wanted.” They are personal and so reveal another’s love for and knowledge of us that we keep them as special, private gifts. They may be very simple and unassuming: a single flower, a made-in-China ceramic frog, or a pink, plastic flamingo—the language of love has a strange but eloquent vocabulary. We don’t talk about these gifts to those outside our circle of intimacy—how could we explain? I know a woman who does actually collect anything that looks like a frog—ceramic, metal, wood—her house is full of them—but I doubt she could explain why they’re there.

Still other presents are such that the joy in receiving them grows by spreading them

around and sharing them with others. The first impulse on receiving the DVD of our favorite film is to find someone to watch it with. And it’s as much fun to watch the movie with another fan as with someone who’s never seen it before.

What do these presents have to do with us here and now? The world has received the most wonderful gift in Christ Jesus. That’s why we give gifts at Christmas, after all: to remind ourselves of the greatest gift. We are reminded of this Christmas present in a special way as together we remember and renew our baptismal covenant, by which we first received the gift of Christ into our lives. We receive this great gift, this greatest gift, much as we do other gifts. Most of us can’t accept, at least at first, all that Jesus asks of us when first he comes into our lives. We may nod politely and say, “How nice,” but we’re already thinking about how to fit this

ungainly package into our spiritual attic.

Then one day we come upon the Presence we've tried to forget—that's presence with a "c"—and realize that what is asked of us is what we want to do after all, and what we've been given the skills to do, to do all that Jesus asks. The stone that the builders rejected is later found to fit exactly in the most crucial spot, and becomes the cornerstone of the building.

At other times Jesus comes to us in that more intimate and personal way so that we may feel shy about sharing that relationship with others. But that is simply how Jesus is: don't be shy—that is how he is—although he comes for all of humanity, still he calls us each by name, treats us each as if we were the sole object of his love. And he does this because that is how his heavenly father treated him. At his own

baptism, as we heard in our gospel today, the heavens were torn apart, and God's Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus like a dove, and a voice spoke to him, a voice from heaven declaring, "You are my Son, the beloved; with you I am well pleased." God speaks the same to all of us and each of us, his children by adoption.

In baptism, God's Spirit descends upon us and makes us heirs through faith—our own faith if we are old enough to possess it, and the faith of our parents and godparents if we are not yet old enough to possess a faith of our own. This wonderful gift is always new in each person, but it is also always a hand-me-down, it is a gift that is given through others, though it comes from God, given and received. Much as a new tree can only grow from a seed from an old tree, the new life in Christ through baptism always comes through those who are already

baptized—the members of the church, which is the body of Christ at work in the world. This new life is a gift that is always given through those who have received it before. And it becomes ours—a part of ourselves, a part of who we are as children of God who have a personal relationship with God, whom we can now call “our Father in heaven.” The love of God for each and all of us begins and grows in that special and holy relationship.

We can relish and enjoy that relationship, but we can also share it with others, indeed we are called and commanded to share it with others, in the knowledge that Jesus shares himself with others too. As we share that gift, that present, conscious of how precious is the gift of salvation, we might at first be tempted to remain within the circle of those who already know Jesus: the church. We relish our

common joy, talking to each other about our favorite parts of the story, like a family that every year gathers around the TV to watch *The Wizard of Oz* or Dickens’ *Christmas Carol*. As wonderful as that kind of sharing is—and it is wonderful to gather week by week in the church, as the church, to celebrate and review and share the story of salvation—the gift of God is too great to keep, just among ourselves.

As the Apostle Peter said, the saving message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee, but spreading far beyond it. And as we know, that same gospel has spread to the far corners of the world. The saving grace of God has been poured out for all to receive.

Right here in this church, every time we perform a baptism—and I’ve officiated at

159 baptisms since I first came to be Vicar here—every time we perform a baptism that gift is given and received, most often by a child brought here by loving parents and godparents. They are sharing a gift that they received when they were young themselves. Someday before too long, the child is old enough to understand the gift that has been given, realize that the present is a Presence, the presence of God within his or her heart, and then join in telling the timeless story to those who have never heard it, bringing the gift of grace to those who don't yet know Jesus.

The Scripture that is fulfilled in our hearing, the Good News, is for each of us and all of us, for “all people that on earth do dwell,” and we are the ministers of this message of salvation—young and old. We have a wonderful gift to share. Spreading this good news, this good news that we are loved

and redeemed by God, is the heart of evangelism, sharing the gift of salvation to the ends of the earth.

Ultimately, evangelism is the good stewardship of the Gospel: sharing that greatest gift, that wonderful presence. It is a gift we would never think of returning to the store, or stowing in the attic. It is a gift so wonderful, so perfect for each of us, the only gift of which it can truly be said, “one size fits all,” the gift that is older than time itself and yet is always new. It is the gift of salvation. God be praised, that we have, each and every one of us, such a wonderful gift to share, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

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HOLY BAPTISME

Since, Lord, to thee
A narrow way and little gate
Is all the passage, on my infancie
Thou didst lay hold, and antedate
My faith in me.

O let me still
Write thee great God, and me a childe:
Let me be soft and supple to thy will,
Small to my self, to others milde,
Behither¹ ill.

Although by stealth
My flesh get on, yet let her sister
My soul bid nothing, but preserve her wealth:
The growth of flesh is but a blister;
Childhood is health.

¹ behither. short of; barring; save.

George Herbert, from The Temple: Sacred Poems and Private Ejaculations

DEATHS

THE REV. WILLIAM M. BAXTER, 90,
in Scarborough, ME

A 1951 graduate of Virginia Theological Seminary, he served in Clayton, Missouri and Washington, D.C., before founding the Marriage and Family Institute in 1970. In retirement, he served as interim rector at Trinity, Lewiston, Maine, where he founded FaithWorks

THE REV. CANON MALCOLM BOYD, 91,
in Los Angeles, CA

After studying at Church Divinity School of the Pacific, Berkeley, he was ordained in 1955. The next year, he received a Master of Sacred Theology from Union Theological Seminary in New York.

He served parishes in Indianapolis and Washington D.C. He also served as Episcopal chaplain at Colorado State in 1959. From 1961 to 1964, he served at Grace Church, Detroit, and as Episcopal chaplain at Wayne State University. In 1965, his widely read *Are You Running With Me, Jesus?* was published. He also served in the Diocese of Los Angeles until retiring in 1996.

THE REV. ROBERT LEE IHLEFELD, 78,
in Silver City, NM

A 1964 graduate of the Episcopal Divinity School in Philadelphia, he later earned a Master of Sacred Theology from Nashotah House. During his ministry he served churches in Iowa, Florida, Kansas, Colorado, and New

Mexico. He was rector of Church of the Good Shepherd in Silver City from 1988 until his retirement in 2008.

**THE REV. CANON
ARTHUR KEITH D'ARCY
KEPHART, 85**
in Appleton, WI

A graduate of Nashotah House Theological Seminary, he was ordained in 1951. He served at Trinity, Baraboo, from 1962-1981 and at All Saints, Appleton, from 1981 until retiring. He was installed as an honorary Canon of the Cathedral Church of St. Paul in 2003.

**THE REV. CANON
CHARLES L. L.
POINDEXTER, 82,**
in Philadelphia, PA


He graduated from Philadelphia Divinity School and furthered his studies at the General Theological Seminary in New York and Chichester

Theological Seminary in England. He was ordained in 1958. He served as rector of St. Barnabas and St. Luke's, Philadelphia, and founded St. Barnabas Episcopal School in 1975.

**THE RT. REV. ORRIS G.
WALKER JR., 72,**
in Ann Arbor, MI

A 1968 graduate of General Theological Seminary, he was ordained a priest in 1969. He served in Kansas City and Detroit before his election as seventh bishop of the Diocese of Long Island in 1991. He retired in 2009. Honorary doctorates in Canon Law and Divinity were conferred by the Berkeley Divinity School at Yale University and the General Theological Seminary in 1988.

*Rest eternal grant unto them
O Lord,
and let light perpetual shine
upon them.*



Will

— ((and)) —

Testament

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